



New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 18, 2022

PRESS CONTACT: Janice Plante
(607) 592-4817, jplante@nefmc.org

Council Approves HAPC for Southern New England; Previews Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment Data Explorer

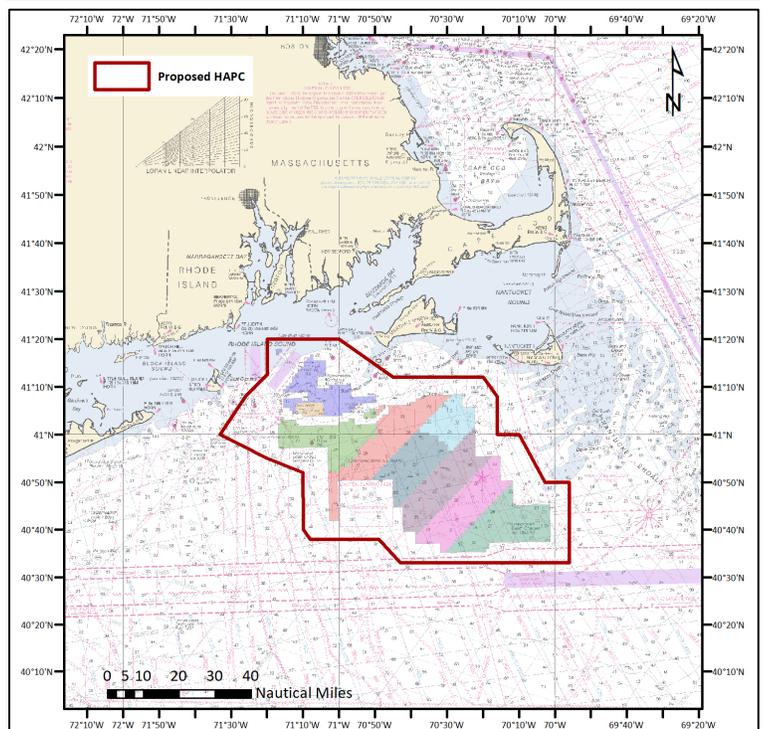
The New England Fishery Management Council voted in late June to establish a new Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) that overlaps offshore wind-energy lease sites in Southern New England and includes a 10-kilometer buffer on all sides of the sites (see map below).

The Council [selected this area](#) to highlight its concerns over potential adverse impacts from offshore wind development on: (1) sensitive hard-bottom habitats; and (2) cod spawning activity. If approved by NOAA Fisheries, the HAPC designation would be applied during the essential fish habitat (EFH) consultation process for offshore wind projects in the area. Some projects are already permitted, while others are currently undergoing environmental review or are within the site assessment phase.

HAPCs are a subset of EFH. The proposed Southern New England HAPC overlaps designated EFH for several Council-managed species that rely on complex habitats. Furthermore, there has been recent evidence of cod spawning activity on Cox Ledge within the proposed HAPC. The boundaries cover the footprint of the wind-energy leases plus a buffer on all sides, recognizing that some aspects of offshore development may have impacts that extend out to at least 10 kilometers, such as acoustic impacts from pile driving.

The Council reviewed [four other HAPC alternatives](#) before selecting this fifth option, which combines the conservation objectives of the other alternatives and emphasizes the importance of complex habitat on the egg, juvenile, and adult life stages of species ranging from herring and scallops to monkfish, skates, winter flounder, and red hake in addition to cod. The Council [initiated the framework](#) for this

Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) Proposed for Southern New England



Above, outlined in red, is the Council's proposed HAPC. The area encompasses offshore wind-energy lease sites in Southern New England and adds a surrounding buffer zone. – New England Council graphic



New England Fishery Management Council

HAPC in February 2022, postponed action in [April](#) pending further development, and took final action in June. View the latest HAPC [presentation](#) and other June meeting materials [here](#).

NORTHEAST REGIONAL HABITAT ASSESSMENT (NRHA) DATA EXPLORER: The Council received a preview of the new [data explorer](#) developed by the Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment [leads](#) working with the Steering Committee, teams, and partners. The Council expressed enthusiastic support during the June demonstration. The tool will continue to be refined with additional data and reports.

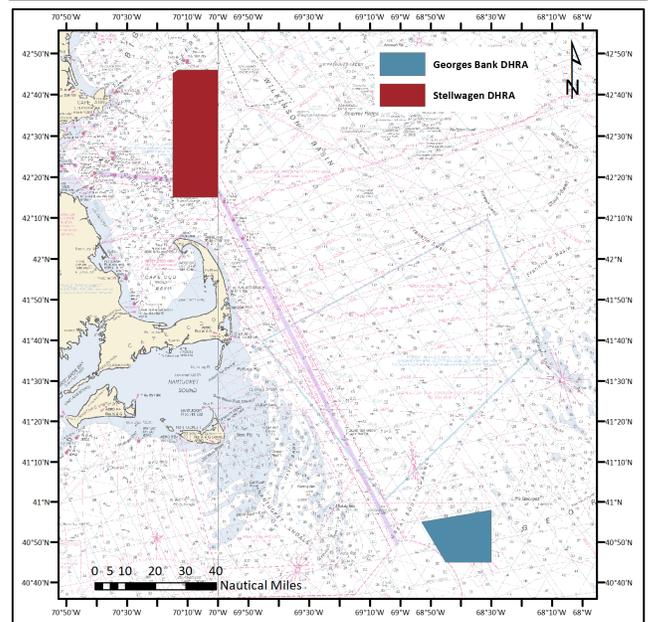
The goal of this three-year project was to describe and characterize estuarine, coastal, and offshore fish habitat distribution, abundance, and quality in the Northeast for more than 65 species with four action-areas in mind:

1. Fish abundance and trends in habitat types in the inshore area;
2. Habitat vulnerability, including responses to changes in climate;
3. Spatial descriptions of species habitat use in the offshore area; and
4. Habitat data visualization and decision support tools.

The data explorer [shares products](#) and provides tools to learn more about fish habitats. It includes survey data summaries, habitat distribution models, and reports.

Stay Tuned! The NRHA team, in conjunction with the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils, will be developing outreach and communications materials over the summer and fall to help everyone [learn how to navigate the data explorer](#) and make the most of its extensive repository of information.

Dedicated Habitat Research Areas

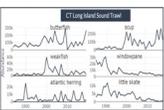


The New England Council developed two Dedicated Habitat Research Areas (DHRAs) – one on Stellwagen Bank and one on Georges Bank as shown above – under Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2 (OHA2). The amendment included a three-year review of the DHRAs and the ability for the Regional Administrator of the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) to remove the areas if no research is being conducted. GARFO is working on the review and will soon publish a notice soliciting information about ongoing research within the DHRAs. The Council created a flow chart (see pages 115-117 in [this document](#)) to evaluate whether the established criteria for maintaining the DHRAs has been met. The Council identified four categories of habitat research priorities in OHA2 that focused on: (1) gear impacts; (2) habitat recovery; (3) natural disturbance; and (4) productivity.

Welcome to the Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment Data Explorer

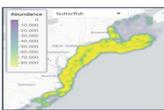
Survey View

Northeast regional and inshore bay/estuary view of fishery independent survey data including top 20 species abundance and biomass, similarity clusters, and survey temperature and salinity data.



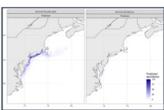
Species View

Species view of fishery independent survey data, including distributions, relative abundance, and reports on habitat use and vulnerability to climate change.



Model View

Outputs from spatiotemporal models that describe species distributions as a function of dynamic environmental factors, species interactions and predicted change in habitat use under various climate scenarios.



Reports

Reports, publications, metadata summaries, trawl and seine survey comparisons and more.





New England Fishery Management Council

The Council received a [presentation](#) from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) on offshore wind-energy development during its [June 28-30, 2022](#) meeting that included updates covering:

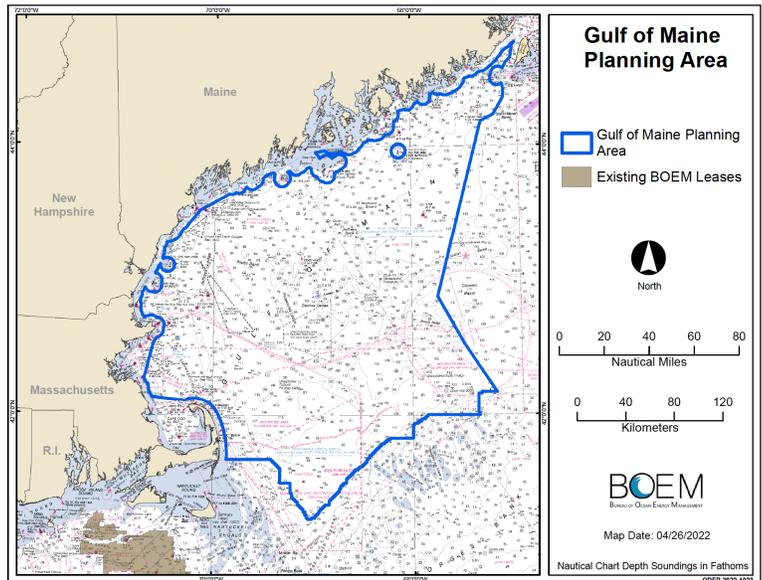
- The [New York Bight](#) Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) and consultation overview that is open for public comment through [August 15, 2022](#);
- BOEM’s [Draft Fisheries Mitigation Guidance](#), which focuses on ways to diminish impacts from offshore wind projects on commercial and recreational fisheries and fishing; and
- The state of Maine’s offshore wind research lease [application](#) and plans for commercial leasing.

MITIGATION: The Council agreed to send a letter to BOEM before the August 22, 2022 comment deadline in response to the bureau’s [request for comments](#) on the Draft Fisheries Mitigation Guidance.

MAINE WIND: Related to commercial leasing in the Gulf of Maine, the Council voted to send a letter to BOEM urging the bureau to conduct a full Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the entire Gulf of Maine Planning Area prior to the identification of any Wind Energy Areas and subsequent leasing.

The Council is striving to better understand the ecological risks and cumulative impacts of offshore wind development on: (1) fishing communities and their cultural heritage within the Gulf of Maine; (2) Council-managed stocks and federal surveys; (3) deep-sea corals and other sensitive and vulnerable habitat; and (4) impacts on species listed under the Endangered Species Act, including North Atlantic right whales, Atlantic sturgeon, Atlantic salmon, and leatherback sea turtles, as well as their designated critical habitat.

The Council also received an [offshore aquaculture](#) update. At its September meeting, the Council may initiate a framework adjustment to the Atlantic Salmon Fishery Management Plan (FMP) to consider allowing the possession of Atlantic salmon in aquaculture operations. The [current FMP](#) is focused on recovery efforts and prohibits possession of Atlantic salmon in federal waters.



- Get a copy of the NOAA Fisheries Aquaculture permitting guide [HERE](#).
- Visit the Council’s [habitat webpage](#).
- All presentations and documents used during the Council’s June 2022 habitat discussion are posted [HERE](#).
- Listen to the [audio](#).

